Legal
Services
Society

British Columbia
www.lss.bc.ca

News Release

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Opinion poll shows public supports legal aid

LSS is an independent, non-profit organization that has provided legal aid to people with low incomes in BC since 1979. Legal aid services include legal representation, advice, and information. The society provides clients with the type of service most likely to help them resolve their legal problems.

Legal representation is available for serious family issues (e.g., involving child apprehension matters or domestic violence) and serious criminal problems. It is also available for some immigration, mental health law, and prison law matters.

Legal advice is available through criminal duty counsel in all courts, family duty counsel in provincial courts and some supreme courts, the Brydges Line, and LawLINE.

Legal information is available through LawLINE, plain language publications, and Internet services, including the Electronic Law Library, Family Law in British Columbia, LSS, and LawLINK websites.

*To contact the **LSS Call Centre and LawLINE**, dial: (604) 408-2172 (Lower Mainland) or 1-866-577-2525 (toll free from outside the Lower Mainland).*

To access the society's websites, go to www.lss.bc.ca.

Vancouver, BC — A recent public opinion poll found there is widespread support for legal aid in BC and strong agreement that the government should give the service the same funding priority it gives other social services.

The poll was conducted for LSS by Ipsos Reid in December 2005. Although 79% of respondents said they know little or nothing about legal aid, once the services were described, 89% said they support them.

The poll also found that 51% of respondents believe legal aid is inadequately funded.

Interviewers told respondents that legal aid provides "low income people with legal information, advice, and/or representation in court. This can include providing them with a self-help kit, giving them a few hours of legal advice, or paying a lawyer to represent them in court for serious family, criminal, or immigration/refugee problems."

LSS commissioned the poll to provide a baseline for measuring the success of its work to raise public awareness of and support for legal aid – a strategic priority set by the society's board last year.

Almost three-quarters of respondents (73%) said they agree with the statement that "governments should give funding for legal aid the same priority as they give to funding for other social services such as health care, education, welfare, and child protection."

"We're pleased with the high level of support for legal aid, although we hope to improve the degree of strong compared to moderate support," said Executive Director Mark Benton.

"The poll also confirms what we've been hearing anecdotally for the past few years – that there is little public awareness of our services," he added.

"This makes our current legal aid awareness campaign all the more important, particularly given some trends that showed up in the poll. For instance, the more people know about legal aid, the more likely they are to support it and consider it important for low income people," he said.

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Over the past two months, LSS Board members have begun meeting with MLAs to explain the range of legal aid services that are available to help their constituents resolve their legal problems (see sidebar, page 1). Benton said this work will be broadened to include other elected officials and the general public in the coming months.

The poll was conducted by telephone from December 7 – 12, 2005, as part of the BC Reid Express provincial omnibus survey for that month. Interviewers asked 763 people 13 questions about legal aid. The margin of error is ±3.5% 19 times out of 20.

For further information, see the poll summary on the LSS website (under About LSS – Reports: scroll down to Evaluations and Reports) and/or contact:

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Legal Services Society
(604) 601-6004

Legal aid highlights from the Ipsos Reid omnibus poll: Dec. 2005

Issue	% response
Know very little (55%*) or nothing (25%*) about legal aid:	79%*
Once advised of what legal aid provides, strongly (56%) or moderately (33%) support the services:	89%
Legal aid is inadequately funded:	51%
Very or somewhat important to justice system fairness to provide low income people with legal aid in criminal court (91%), family court (94%), other civil proceedings (91%), immigration/ refugee hearings (83%):	83-94%
Strongly (86%) or moderately (11%) agree that everyone should have the right to access the justice system:	97%
Strongly (37%) or moderately (36%) agree with the statement that "governments should give funding for legal aid the same priority as they give to funding for other social services such as health care, education, welfare, and child protection":	73%
Legal aid is readily or somewhat available for criminal law (62%), family law (53%), immigration/refugee law (52%), other civil law (55%):	52-62%

**totals differ due to rounding*

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